

TRANSGRESSIONS

When youth
and beauty are
sacred the transgressions
most feared are deformity and
old age.

HOLY BATHING PLACE: ALLAHABAD

i.

Ancient Prayaga, where the Jumna
meets the Ganga and where all India
mingles together in holy pilgrimage.

Here in the deep shade of a Moghul wall
rows of barbers attend the orthodox,
for whom immersion at this hallowed place
requires a total shaving of the head.

Nearby in an underground temple
stands a sacred banyan tree which many
Hindus believe will never die,
first mentioned by a Chinese traveller
over thirteen hundred years ago.

ii.

A smiling Brahmin sitting placidly
under a bright yellow sunshade
gives his blessing for a small fee.

A Rajasthani peasant clutching a bundle
threads his way warily between
buffalo carts, camels, and sauntering cows,
between sadhus, gypsies and beggars.

A Delhi business man in a loincloth
strolls along the sand watching the women
throwing rose-petals into the Ganga,
then lingers before a gaudy picture of Brahma
at one of the many improvised stalls.